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UNCLAS MANAMA 001741

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: PROTESTS AGAINST MILITARY ACTION IN FALLUJAH DRAW
SMALL CROWDS

REF: MANAMA 1707

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1. (U) Organizers had estimated that the two protests against U.S. and Iraqi military action in Fallujah would draw 10,000 people. In the end, only 350 people total took part in the November 19 demonstrations. Though Al Wifaq President and prominent Shia leader Ali Salman was at the front of one protest, few Shia participated. Both demonstrations were peaceful.

2. (U) The first rally immediately followed Friday prayers at the Al Fateh Grand Mosque. Approximately 200 people (RSO estimate) including members of parliament marched for an hour and a half. Al Wifaq President Ali Salman and several Shia clergymen were present, but very few other Shia participated despite Salman's calls for Shia to turn out for the demonstration. Protesters carried signs condemning U.S. forces and demanding their withdrawal from Iraq. They also condemned the Iraqi Interim Government as well as Iraqi insurgents who kill civilians. Protesters stomped on and burned an American and an Israeli flag. The second demonstration took place in Muharraaq and was attended by 150 people (RSO estimate); few if any were Shia. The leaders and organizers of the Muharraaq demonstration were Sunni Salafis, including parliamentarian Mohammed Khalid who days earlier had publicly insulted Bahrain's Shia for not condemning the Fallujah attack more vigorously (reftel). The Governor of Muharraaq also reportedly participated. Participants accused the United States of serious human rights violations in Fallujah and criticized attacks on mosques.

3. (SBU) Comment: Despite the low turnout for the demonstrations, many Bahrainis are angry about the MNF-I and Iraqi attack on Fallujah. They are particularly seized with the media image of the Marine shooting an apparently unarmed fighter and with press reports that few insurgents in Fallujah were foreign. This emotion has been on display in newspaper editorials and cartoons and in sermons in both Sunni and Shia mosques. But Shia Bahrainis, who are more likely to take to the streets than Sunnis, have decided not to do so at this time because of lingering resentment over Mohammed Khalid's antics in parliament and a real lack of connection to the insurgents in Fallujah, who many view as mostly terrorists along the lines of Zarqawi.

MONROE